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'How Donovan Persuades Fidel'

NEW YORK -- (UPI) -- James B. Donovan, the one-man freedom train for persons imprisoned in Cuba, has been losing two things recently -- sleep and money.

The Brooklyn lawyer, who negotiated the release of the Bay of Pigs prisoners and more recently nine American skin divers, told Monday about the physical and mental strain of negotiating with Fidel Castro.

"They work at night down there," he said. "One night I got three hours sleep, another time two hours and a third night none at all. Once Castro phoned me at 2 o'clock in the morning and announced we were going fishing at 6 o'clock. We did, too."

So far as money is concerned, lawyers estimate Donovan has lost \$100,000 in legal fees because of his work in rescuing prisoners in Cuba.

He is counsel for the Cuban Families Committee and serves without pay. Not that he is about to become a pauper because he is a member of a well-known firm that has 18 lawyers on its staff.

But he has made substantial financial sacrifices ever since he was named by the Brooklyn Bar Association to defend the Soviet spy, Col. Rudolf Abel.

Subsequently Donovan negotiated the exchange of Abel for U2 Pilot Francis Gary Powers.

That led to the dozen trips he has made to Cuba and his work is not finished yet. There are still 22 Americans held by Castro and Donovan hopes to negotiate for them in about a month.

How does he establish contact with Castro and go about getting into Cuba?

"Well," he said, "I'll tell you about one weekend. On

Friday, I was in federal court here. When I want to go to Cuba, I make a phone call to Havana to a person who is a sort of intermediary down there. I had put in a call and Friday afternoon I got word that clearance had come through."

"I didn't make a reservation, but I went out to Idlewild Airport and got a seat on a jet for Miami. I always fly down there at night. At Miami I went to a hotel and registered under an assumed name. You have to be careful to choose a name that matches the initials on your baggage and I use Davis a lot of the time."

"I only carry one bag containing tropical clothing and a brief case. From the hotel I phoned a restricted area of the Miami airport and got in touch with an airline, which provides a small plane for the flight to Havana. I asked them to get clearance for me to fly across the Cuban anti-aircraft batteries. It came through pretty fast this time and we took off for Havana."

"Seven men, well-armed and wearing black silk suits met me at Havana. I didn't have to show a visa or a passport or anything. I guess my face is pretty well known by now. Three of the men got into a car with me and the other four into another car and we drove to one of the four houses maintained by the Cuban ministry of external affairs. Everything was ready for me there and I put in a call for Castro."

"Sometimes I get to see Castro right away and sometimes there is a delay of hours. I started talking with him on Saturday and continued through on Sunday."

"Saturday he took me for an automobile ride and we kept negotiating. He is always very courteous and correct and he gave me a good lunch of fruit cup, chicken soup, red snapper, salad and coffee. Also an excellent cigar."

"By Sunday I could tell that the negotiations weren't getting very far, so I decided to try the luck of the Irish. I said to Castro: 'Look, do you know what day this is? This is Saint Patrick's Day and Saint Patrick is my patron saint. They are painting a green line down Fifth Ave. in New York and getting ready to have a parade.'

"Do you know who one of the big heroes of South America is? Bernard O'Higgins is his name. It's bad luck to deny anything to an Irishman on Saint Patrick's Day, and what's more you have two American women in prison and one of them is named O'Neal."

Somewhat to Donovan's surprise this Celtic appeal impressed Castro. He went away for a while and then returned and said he was releasing the two women, Geraldine Schamma and Martha O'Neal.

The women came out of jail wearing their denim prison clothes, and Donovan flew back to Miami with them Sunday.

"Monday morning," Donovan said, "I was back in federal court and the judge look-

ed at me sort of surprised and asked: 'Well, where have you been and what's new?'"